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CHAFEE HAILS \$1 MILLION EPA GRANT TO AID PASCOAG WITH GROUNDWATER CONTAMINATION

Senator Has Introduced Legislation to Prevent Future Pascoags

WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Senator Lincoln Chafee today hailed a decision by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to provide \$1 million in federal funds to the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) to assess and clean up groundwater contamination problems in Pascoag.

The funds, which will come from the EPA's Office of Underground Storage Tanks, can be used by RIDEM for site investigation and cleanup, as well as for reimbursement of certain expenses associated with the contamination. The grant will assist Pascoag in its effort to recover from the effects of contamination of local groundwater by the gasoline additive methyl tertiary butyl ether (MTBE).

"I'm very pleased that the citizens of Pascoag will finally receive the federal assistance they need to cope with the MTBE contamination that has had such a huge impact on their daily lives," Chafee said.

"Unfortunately, the Village of Pascoag is just one of hundreds of communities across the nation that has suffered from MTBE contamination that can be traced to leaking underground storage tanks," Chafee continued. "Legislation I have introduced would help prevent future incidents of contamination, while providing communities like Pascoag with the federal help they need to clean up the contaminated sites."

Senator Chafee is former chairman and currently ranking republican on the Senate Environment and Public Works Subcommittee on Superfund, Toxics, Risk, and Waste Management, which has jurisdiction over the EPA's regulation of underground storage tanks.

In December 2001, Chafee introduced legislation – the Underground Storage Tank Compliance Act (S. 1850) – that would require more frequent UST inspections, while providing federal funding for training of UST operators and for cleanup of contaminated sites such as Pascoag. Earlier this year, Chafee chaired a field hearing on the bill in Pascoag. Another hearing is scheduled this week.

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Leaking Underground Storage Tanks (USTs)

In 1984, Congress enacted legislation requiring underground storage tanks to meet minimum federal requirements for leak detection and prevention standards. In 1988, owners and operators of existing underground storage tank systems were given a ten-year window to upgrade, replace, or close tanks that didn't meet minimum federal requirements for spill, overfill, and corrosion protections. As the deadline passed on December 22, 1998, many underground storage tanks failed to meet the federal standards.

In 1999, Senator Chafee joined Senator Bob Smith (R-NH) in asking the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) to assess the compliance of USTs with federal standards. In a May 2001 report, the GAO concluded that only 89 percent of tanks meet federal equipment standards. The GAO also reported that only 71 percent of tanks were being operated and maintained properly. The report cited infrequent tank inspections and limited funding among the culprits for these low percentages.

The report – “Improved Inspections and Enforcement Would Better Ensure the Safety of Underground Storage Tanks” (Report Number: GAO-01-464) – can be located on the GAO website: www.gao.gov.

Underground Storage Tank (UST) Compliance Act

The UST Compliance Act would require the inspection of all tanks every two years, while increasing federal emphasis on training of UST operators. The legislation emphasizes compliance of tanks owned by federal, state, and local governments, and provides \$200 million for cleanup of sites contaminated by MTBE. Finally, the legislation provides increased funding to administer the federal UST program, which the GAO has identified as critical piece of the solution.

On February 25, 2002, Chafee chaired a field hearing of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee in Pascoag to examine the problems involving leaking underground storage tanks, MTBE contamination, and the efficacy of S. 1850. The Subcommittee on Superfund, Toxics, Risk and Waste Management – of which Chafee is the ranking republican -- is scheduled to conduct a second hearing on the Chafee UST bill on Wednesday, May 8th.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Information regarding the EPA's Underground Storage Tank program can be found at the Office of Underground Storage Tank website: <http://www.epa.gov/swrust1/aboutust.htm>. A fact sheet on the Underground Storage Tank (UST) Compliance Act (S. 1850) is attached.

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